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Editorial: NFL drops the football

Two recent incidents involving star players in the National Football League highlight a problem that, sadly, continues to thrive in the shadows: domestic abuse.

Sept. 12, a Texas grand jury indicted Minnesota Vikings running back Adrian Peterson on charges of “reckless or negligent injury to a child.” Peterson allegedly used a switch to beat his 4-year-old son.

The Vikings responded by deactivating Peterson for one game. The reproach from sponsors and fans was swift. Minnesota Vikings owner Zygi Wilf called this “a mistake” and announced Peterson’s deactivation during legal proceedings at a Wednesday news conference.

This scandal broke just as another accused NFL running back, Ray Rice of the Baltimore Ravens, also felt the heat of public scrutiny.

“Rice became the center of a firestorm after a video was released showing him dragging his unconscious fiancée, Janay Palmer, out of an elevator at the Revel Casino in Atlantic City on Feb. 15,” reported Michael Kinney of the CNHI News Service in a story we published Sept. 9. “It was later revealed Rice had hit Palmer and knocked her out.”

Rice was indicted in March on third-degree aggravated assault charges, which were later dropped. In July, Rice was suspended from the first two games of the season. Like Wilf, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell later called this decision a mistake and increased the punishment. Rice's contract was terminated Sept. 8 after graphic footage of the attack leaked.

"The league [and Goodell] have been adamant they didn't see the violent images until this week," reported Tom Pelissero of USA Today on Sept. 10. "But a law enforcement official told the Associated Press he sent a video ... to an NFL executive five months ago."

The problem of domestic abuse cuts across all economic classes. A report released this month by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention paints the startling picture: More than 31 percent of American women have been physically assaulted by a partner in their lives. And the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports 12 out of every 1,000 children up to age 18 in the United States are found to be victims of maltreatment.

It is to Goodell's and the NFL's eternal shame these incidents were so tremendously mishandled. Goodell is now in damage-control mode, announcing a review and overhaul of the league's domestic violence policy. That's a step in the right direction, but remember what actually caused them to take action. It wasn't the incidents themselves, but the outrage. The loss of revenue was the only cry the NFL heard.

